

## **FOOD AS NATURAL MEDICINE: LIFESTYLE, KNOWLEDGE, AND HEALTHCARE PRACTICES OF INDIAN SCHEDULED TRIBES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*If the humans' intake of food as medicine will keep their bodies healthy, emotionally balanced, and socially wealthy The illness can be kept at a distance to help people find out a way for contributing their might in many spheres of life. Research shows that dietary habits influence disease risk, though certain foods may activate chronic health conditions, others offer strong medicinal and caring qualities. This idea has motivated many scholars to throw light on initiating their arguments on whether food is medicine. On the other hand, diet alone cannot replace medicine in all situations. However, a number of diseases can be prevented, treated, or even cured by nutritional and lifestyle changes. Many nutrients in food encourage health and protect the human body from diseases and eating whole, nutritious foods is important because their unique materials work steadily to create an effect to deliver the best. Good nutrition and what you put into your body is the foundation for good health. Food is Medicine is a term that was originally invented by Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine; it was his belief that eating nourishing food is the basis for good health. Hippocrates said almost 2500 years ago leave your drugs in the chemist's pot if you can heal the patient with food. Centuries ago the earliest known physicians and health practitioners across the world informed the benefits of using food as medicine to heal the body and now based on inquiry it is clearly apparent that food plays a foremost role in health and how you feel on a day-to-day basis. Hippocrates believed that illness stemmed from inadequate nutrition and bad eating habits and that if people were to learn well-eating habits then best health would be restored. Long ago, medicines were commonly used, wise tribal elders would seek out healing herbs, and plants for their community, and food would be applied hard to bring about healing. Gradually through the years, man has moved away from the healing power of nature and towards prescribing packaged artificial drugs, and medicines to contract diseases. The reality is that because we have shifted away from natural remedies and many of us rely on a diet of processed, greasy, and food with sugariness the penalties are that rates of obesity and disease have increased significantly. In this context, this paper highlights the tribes' food culture which prevents a number of diseases, keeps them healthy, and is always ready to deliver their labour. They are in a position to follow conventional healthcare practices based on plants and magical-religious practices. Among the tribal community **Food as natural medicine**, is a slogan that is experienced day-to-day and it helps them to live a long life. Their strong belief is eating healthy food which is easily accessible for keeping the allopathy medicine at a long distance which is the secret to their longevity of life. The tribes in India have learned to live in the most natural environmental condition they live in localities that are vastly rich in biodiversity.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Longevity of Life, Long Distance, Dietary Habits, Natural Environment, Rich Biodiversity, Magical-Religious, Allopath, Caring Qualities, Healing Power, Rich Knowledge*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Sociology of food culture is very significant in terms of habits of the people, living atmosphere, motivation towards healthy life style, and consciousness about the intake food. The sociology of food is the study of food as it relates to the history, development, and upcoming growth of society, surrounding its production, groundwork, ingesting, delivery, medical, ceremonial, mystical, moral, national applications, related environmental, and labour issues. The aspect of food distribution in our society can be examined through the analysis of the changes in the food source cable. Globalization, in specific, has important belongings on the food supply chain by allowing gage effects in the food delivery manufacturing. As the functional aspects of society we can comprehend that India is a country with large cultural diversified society with different languages spoken, and has enormous wealth because of its ironic in biodiversity. According to an estimation there are about 45,000 species of wild plant out of which 9,500 species are ethno-botanically important class. Of these 7,500 species are in therapeutic use for native health practices. About 3,900 plant species are used by tribes as food (out of which 145 species comprise of root and rhizomes, 521 species of verdant vegetables, 101 species of bulbs and flowers, 647 species of fruits), 525 species are used for fibre, 400 species are used as food, 300 species are used in training and removal of chemicals which are used as naturally happening insecticides and pesticides, 300 species are used for extraction of secretion, mastics, dyes and perfume (Arora, <sup>2</sup>). In addition to these a number of plants are used as timber, structure physical and about 700 species are socially important from moral, cultural, religious, aesthetic and social point of view of. Indian is one of the twelve mega-centres of biodiversity on behalf of two of the eighteen hotspots of biological diversity one occurring in Western Ghat and another in North- Eastern Himalaya Floristically 141 widespread genera belonging to over 47 families of higher plant occur in India In India nearly 12.00% of the world's biodiversity has been conserved by ethnic people in many ways. Botanical survey of India has reported 46,214 plant species are found in India of global flora of these 17,500 represents flowering plants. Thirty seven of these are endemic and found in North-East of India

If food has the power to stop much of the long-lasting disease we experience today then it makes sense to change our foods to use it to our own benefit to not only heal and reinstate the body but also to prevent illness. Although taking pharmaceutical drugs for illnesses may be useful, they often come with short and long term side effects and contribute to the toxic build up in our bodies. While drugs are significant in life threatening situations, if long term conditions can be managed with diet and existence changes then using food as medicine must be considered as a initial way of tackling the issue and preventing future health problems. Health practitioners and scientists are now uncovering the benefits of Nutrigenomics and the whole notion that food is information that says to our genes and activates messages that create health or disease. There are many factors that culminate to transport about disease such as stress, nutrition, hormone balance, the health of our gut, and the importance of detoxification and food. Thinking about what is at the end of your fork can help you to avoid specific illnesses that arise due to years of unhealthy eating. The good news is that these can be reversed with the help of a good diet. Even if we live on take-out we can make healthier selections. More and more food

services, eateries, and other institutions are recognizing the curative power of food and are including healing foods as part of their menus so healthy food is not as hard to find as it once was.

With this backdrop, the authors bring out the tribes' food habits which makes them happy and bring out their best in connection with healthy life is concerned. The authors have conducted the case studies amongst the Malayali tribe who are living in Kalrayan hills in Salem district of Tamil Nadu. They have used descriptive research design which is fact finding investigation studied problem. They have used case studies as a method to collect data and explore many facets about their life style and healthcare practices of the mentioned tribes

### **Case Study: 1**

Ram lingam, 89 age old man who lives at chinakalrayan hills and the man one who not approach modern medicines so far He used to take natural food alone which they plant themselves at their own land. He take porridge which is made from Ragi and various millets. He do not take idly, dosai and other food items which we take in plant land people. Variety of lettuce used to eat and fulfill his dietary and healthy life. He used to walk miles to reach various places since he lived interior forest areas. His occupation is agriculture. He used to plant millet varieties and pepper and other grocery items. He planted some vegetables as well as fruits. He didn't use any pesticides for his plants. So, they are eating healthy and non-chemical foods. Due to his food pattern he live long life and he didn't approach modern medicines for his illness. He has vast knowledge about plants which is used for medicinal purposes. If he find any sickness he used to take decoctions, juices extracts from medicinal plants and sometimes plants taken by raw helping him to cure his diseases. He act as medicinal practitioners in this area. He has knowledge about indigenous medicines for poisonous bits, headache, stomach pain and skin diseases etc. He strongly believed that food helps human to keep body healthy. According to him food habits is the key for long life. "When older days there was no hospitals we took home medicines which practiced by our ancestors using plants (Pachilais). Now our younger generations are not interested to follow these medicines. But people from outside came here to avail these traditional medicines for various ailments. Since the modern medicines playing a vital role still our indigenous practices helps us to live long life and outsiders also willingly following our traditions will makes us proud".

### **Case Study: 2**

Peachimuthu, 58 years old lady still act as medical practitioner among tribes at Chinnakalrayan Hills. She extend all kinds of help to women for safety deliveries. Mostly these tribal women followed home based deliveries. Pre Natal care and Post natal care was taught by traditional practitioners like Peachimuthu. She prescribes certain food items which the pregnant women supposed to take during pregnancy time. The food chart which prescribed by the practitioner helps them to improve their immunity and to increase blood Hemoglobin level which is must for pregnant women. She used to recommend foods which are planted by tribes in their own land. Since they are living interior part of the forest, they can easily access natural lettuces, plants and cereals, groceries and millet varieties without any chemical added. These food items are taking place in their daily routine food chart. And also the tribes especially women are working hard and walking a mile easily as their daily practices. It will help them to give normal delivery and live healthy life. Before 30 years there were no hospitals in this area so women had given birth at home itself. Now there is a highly equipped hospitals located at karumandurai we followed indigenous medicines for our primary health care needs. Younger generations wants to get cure immediately and they do not want to have any diet during the treatment period. So these kind of traditional practices are slowly vanish out.

### Case Study: 3

Bharathi, 42 years home maker living in chinnakalrayan hills engaging themselves in agriculture work She has two children studying at Tribal residential Government school at karumandurai. Her husband involved agriculture work. She have rich plant knowledge since she is not a health practitioner. She used to cook millets like little millet, barnyard millet, pearl millet, Foxtail millet etc. She used rye, corn etc and vegetables and lettuce which is planted nearby their surroundings. No colour added and junk foods taken by the tribes. She takes millet varieties most of these substances are safe, biodegradable, less persistent, non-toxic, and easily available in and around their house areas. When she fall sick she used to takes green leaves in the form of decoction and paste (Pachilai Vaithiyam). Her house located in to interior forest area helps her to collect healthy vegetables and lettuces like drumstick greens (murungai ilia), celosia argentea (pannaikeerai), solanum nigrum (manathakkali keerai), stem lettuce (thandu keerai), spinach (pasalai keerai), Indian coral tree (Kalyana murungai), Takoli (kattupachilai), Common leucas (Thumbai), Multivitamin plant (Thavasikeerai) etc. will help them live long life and healthy life. She is following this food pattern in her family. Her children also practicing this food pattern only.

### CONCLUSIONS

In this research paper, the above case studies are express that vast knowledge about traditional food pattern and medicines are having by the Malayali tribes. Still they are following their own food patterns and medicines to cure various diseases. This traditional knowledge is transmitted by the ancestors to the younger generations. Their healthy food system and the way of physical activities help them to live long and healthy life. The lives of tribal prove the sentence **Food as natural medicines**. Unfortunately the lack of interest among the younger generations leads to lose of this knowledge. There is an alarming situation to document these traditional practices will help us to avoid and preserve from new emerging diseases Food is a culture, system, motivational phenomenon, and inspiring source of energy. The studied tribes show the healthy body keeps the high profile on delivering their labor. According to them man is an industrious if he keeps the momentum of energy by taking the healthy food style which has been traditionally practiced is the compact mechanism. In the present context, which is need of the hour to morale building process and healthy atmosphere without compromise anything?

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